



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## DEPLOYMENT CEREMONY SCHEDULED FOR SIOUX FALLS GUARD UNIT

A deployment ceremony is scheduled for more than 190 soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade on Friday, August 28, at 1 p.m. at the Sioux Falls Arena.

The unit will deploy to Djibouti to support Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa to conduct operations in the region that enhance partner nation capacity, promote regional security and stability, dissuade conflict, and protect U.S. and coalition interests.

The mission of the 196th MEB is to command and control assigned units and support the security, mobility, and functional operations of forces in a designated region.

The ceremony will be limited to unit soldiers and their family members, as well as SDNG leadership, to allow for health and social distancing guidelines. The ceremony will be live streamed for public viewing via Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard>.

Planned speakers for the ceremony include Gov. Kristi Noem; Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general; and Col. David Dailey, 196th commander.

The unit will report to Fort Hood, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deployment overseas.

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# VA TO AWARD MORE THAN 425 GRANTS, \$279 MILLION TO HELP PREVENT AND END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will award more than 425 grants to community organizations totaling approximately \$279 million under the [Grant Per Diem \(GPD\) program](#).

The GPD program provides funding to community organizations that provide transitional housing and supportive services for homeless veterans, with the goal of helping homeless veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and income and obtain greater self-determination.

“The GPD program is one component of VA’s multifaceted continuum of services and resources to help veterans exit homelessness,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “No veteran should ever have to worry whether they will have stable housing, and these grants put us one step closer to ensuring all veterans are living in a safe and supportive environment.”

The award period begins Oct. 1 to support three different types of grants to address the unique needs of veterans who are homeless:

- **Per Diem only grants** are used to provide transitional housing beds and operate service centers for veterans experiencing homelessness. These grants provide funding in the form of per diem payments to reimburse grantees for the cost of care provided to veterans during the award period. A total of 369 grants to organizations will be awarded to provide 12,138 beds and 18 service centers totaling approximately \$221 million.
- **Special Need grants** provide funding to organizations that incur additional operational costs to help veterans with special needs who are experiencing homelessness, including women, individuals with chronic mental illnesses and veterans who care for minor dependents. A total of 11 grants to organizations will be awarded totaling approximately \$2.4 million.
- **Transition in Place grants** provide funding to community agencies that place veterans experiencing homelessness in transitional housing while providing them with supportive services. These services are designed to help veterans become more stable and independent, with the ultimate goal of veterans assuming full responsibility for the lease or other housing agreement. When that goal has been achieved, the transitional residence becomes the veteran’s permanent residence, and supportive services come to an end. A total of 46 grants to organizations will be awarded to provide 723 beds totaling \$55.3 million.

The GPD program has provided veterans who are homeless with community-based transitional housing and supportive services since 1994. The number of veterans experiencing homelessness in the U.S. has declined by 50% since 2010 — resulting from the GPD program and other VA efforts.

Information about the GPD program <https://www.va.gov/homeless/gpd.asp> and a list of grantees is available at <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/GPD/GPD-Final-PDO-Award-List-08112020.pdf>, <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/GPD/GPD-Final-SN-Award-List-08112020.pdf> and <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/GPD/GPD-Final-TIP-Award-List-08112020.pdf>.

# VETERANS DAY AT THE SD STATE FAIR

At the request of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Gov. Kristi Noem has proclaimed Thursday, Sept. 3, 2020, as Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair, calling on all South Dakotans to honor those men and women who fought bravely for our freedoms.

At 10:30 a.m. on September 3, the South Dakota State Fair will host a "Salute to Veterans" program in the Grandstand. South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg will serve as the keynote speaker. A combat veteran, Ravnsborg deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom to Germany, Iraq, and Afghanistan. He currently serves as a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Army Reserves with nearly 24 years of service. He has had four company commands and also served as a battalion commander overseeing over 600 soldiers in South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska and Missouri. He is currently assigned to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

"Whether in peace or at war, the important role of our veterans cannot be denied. They are men and women from all walks of life that have one thing in common – a love for this great country," said Secretary Greg Whitlock. "No matter where or when veterans have served, they've always served with distinction and their service to this country is a bridge that was built on courage, dedication and patriotism."

Representatives from the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will have an informational booth (Booth #50) in the Expo Building throughout the week. Veterans are encouraged to stop by the booth and learn more about benefits and programs available to them as well.

Whitlock especially encourages Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans to stop by and visit with SDDVA staff about disability benefits.

To show appreciation for their service, the Fair will give all veterans and active military personnel free gate admission on Sept 3.



## *"Salute To Veterans"*

*Thursday, September 3 - 10:30 AM - Grandstand*

*Master of Ceremonies ~ Senator Mike Vehle*

*Posting of Colors*

*National Anthem ~ Terasa Gillen*

*Opening Prayer ~ Pastor Nick Helkenn*

*Huron Open Bible Church*

*Speaker:*

*South Dakota Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg*

*Special Music - Terasa Gillen*

*Special Guest:*

*Governor Kristi Noem*

*Chet Sorenson Veteran of the Year Award*

*God Bless America ~ Everyone*

*Retiring of the Colors*

*Dismissal of the Troops*

# VA PARTNERS WITH ONSTAR TO BRING SUICIDE PREVENTION TO VETERANS WITH THE PUSH OF A BUTTON

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is partnering with [OnStar](#)'s emergency services to improve access to suicide prevention resources for veterans.

This partnership will offer veterans in crisis the opportunity to be transferred to around-the-clock, confidential support via the VA's [Veterans Crisis Line](#) (VCL) when they use the emergency services button in an OnStar-equipped vehicle or OnStar Guardian smartphone app.

"The VA-OnStar partnership aims to promote suicide prevention and reduce deaths by suicide by providing additional resources to veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This partnership will help veterans access suicide prevention support services and assistance directly and immediately. More than 400 VA suicide prevention coordinators and their teams, located at every VA medical center, connect veterans with care and educate the community about suicide prevention programs and resources daily."

An average of 20 veterans die by suicide each day. Through this partnership, VA and OnStar, a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors, will collaborate to provide education and training to VA clinicians and OnStar call center staff to facilitate suicide prevention efforts for veterans. Additionally, the VA will provide resources and education to OnStar about military culture and how to determine if a caller is a veteran.



Welcome to OnStar

ular veterans, a crisis can start from within," said Catherine Bishop, senior global emergency services manager for OnStar. "This partnership with the VA allows our emergency-certified advisors to better serve the heroes who have served us."

Suicide prevention is a top priority and the VA has made great strides in veteran suicide prevention, especially in crisis intervention. Partnerships such as this are coordinated by the Veterans Health Administration's [Office of Community Engagement](#).

# SOCIAL SECURITY EXPEDITES DECISIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

Andrew Saul, Commissioner of Social Security, announced five new Compassionate Allowances conditions: Desmoplastic Small Round Cell Tumors, GM1 Gangliosidosis - Infantile and Juvenile Forms, Nicolaides-Baraister Syndrome, Rubinstein-Tybai Syndrome, and Secondary Adenocarcinoma of the Brain. Compassionate Allowances is a program to quickly identify severe medical conditions and diseases that meet Social Security's standards for disability benefits.

"Social Security's top priority is to serve the public, and we remain committed to improving the disability determination process for Americans," said Commissioner Saul. "Our Compassionate Allowances program gets us one step closer to reaching our goals by helping us accelerate the disability process for people who are likely to get approved for benefits due to the severity of their condition."



Social Security

The Compassionate Allowances program quickly identifies claims where the applicant's condition or disease clearly meets Social Security's statutory standard for disability. Due to the severe nature of many of these conditions, these claims are often allowed based on medical confirmation of the diagnosis alone. To date, more than 600,000 people with severe disabilities have been approved through this accelerated, policy-compliant disability process. Over the last decade, the list has grown to a total of 242 conditions, including certain cancers, adult brain disorders, and a number of rare disorders that affect children.

The agency incorporates leading technology to identify potential Compassionate Allowances and make quick decisions. When a person applies for disability benefits, Social Security must obtain medical records in order to make an accurate determination. Social Security's Health IT brings the speed and efficiency of electronic medical records to the disability determination process. With electronic records transmission, Social Security is able to quickly obtain a claimant's medical information, review it, and make a determination faster than ever before.

For more information about the program, including a list of all Compassionate Allowances conditions, please visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances).

To learn more about Social Security's Health IT program, please visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/hit](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/hit).

People may apply online for disability benefits by visiting [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).

To create a *my Social Security* account, please visit [www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount).



# **VA DECREASES MAIL PROCESSING TIME FOR CLAIMS**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the [Veterans Benefits Administration \(VBA\)](#) has improved procedures by incorporating an artificial intelligence (AI) solution to reduce the time it takes to process in-coming mail from 10 days to just one day.

The software reads the mail document contents and automatically routes it to VA employees working the next step of the claims process; which means faster processing of the information veterans send to VBA in support of their claims.

“Moving past manual mail processes to automation puts the emphasis on veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This new capability allows the VA to process veterans’ claims quickly and efficiently.”

On average VBA receives more than 550,000 pieces of mail per month related to benefits and services. The volume of mail comes from submissions by veterans, surviving spouses, service agencies, attorneys and claims agents. This mail is often the starting point to initiate a claim or provide supportive documentation for potential benefits and services they may be eligible for; in addition to general inquires.

Visit [VBA](#) for more program information.

# **LEITHEISER APPOINTED AS ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR PATIENT CARE SERVICES**

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System announced Susan Leitheiser, MS, RN, FNP-BC, has accepted the role of Associate Director for Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive effective August 16, 2020.

Ms. Leitheiser entered VA service as a Nurse Practitioner in 2004 at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System. Prior to her new position, she served as the Mental Health Service Line Director since 2015. She has also served as the Associate Chief Nurse for Primary & Specialty Medicine, Emergency Department, Inpatient and Surgery.

Ms. Leitheiser earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1989 from Mount Marty College, a Master of Science in Nursing in 1998 from South Dakota State University and achieved ANCC Certification as a Family Nurse Practitioner in 1998.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 24—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—Sioux Falls  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 5—DAV/727 Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings  
Sep 7—State Offices Closed  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Sep 18—POW/MIA Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—Sioux Falls—6:30 pm (CT)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception



The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will have a booth at the State Fair.

On Thursday, September 3, the Department will be located in front of the Grand Stands where the "Veterans Day at the Fair" program will be held.

On Friday-Monday, September 4-7, the Department will have a booth in the Expo Building.

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/default.html>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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